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AUTHOR Sarkees, Michelle D.
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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to assist vocational educators in developing a process and materials for communicating vocational education options to disadvantaged students and their parents. The first section outlines the provisions of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act regarding state responsibilities to provide vocational education services and activities for handicapped and disadvantaged students. Described next is a local-level process for disseminating information on vocational education options that includes the following 11 components: career development activities, guidance and counseling services, information relative to vocational education opportunities and eligibility requirements, vocational assessment, equal access with respect to recruitment and placement activites, a full range of vocational programs, the least-restrictive environment, educational planning reflecting coordination among vocational and special educators, individualized education programs (IEPs), special services with modifications to meet individual needs, and transition counseling services. The next two sections cover the importance of providing vocational education information to disadvantaged students and their parents/guardians and state responsibilities for providing information. A table details the procedures and persons involved in 25 information dissemination activities and materials. Concluding the guide are lists of concerns expressed by persons surveyed regarding the educational information needs of disadvantaged persons and the challenges for individuals working with disadvantaged populations. (MN)

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COMMUNICATING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION OPTIONS TO DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS

Michelle D. Sarkees
Associate Professor
Division of Vocational Education
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia

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Provisions of the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act

The assurance that vocational education information will be provided to disadvantaged students and their parents is clearly specified in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (P.L. 98-524) as follows:

> Each local education agency shall provide information to handicapped and disadvantaged students and parents of such students concerning the opportunities available in vocational education at least one year before the students enter the grade level in which vocational education programs are first generally available in the State, but in no event later than the beginning of the ninth grade, together with the requirements for eligibility for enrollment in such vocational eudcation programs (P.L. 98-524, Section 204 b).

Sometimes referred to as "youth find" (Hasazi, et al, 1983; Albright, 1986), this mandate cannot possibly be adequately addressed unless it is seen as an essential component of a process as opposed to a separate activity that is conducted by a local school district. The process should flow from the sum of assurances provided for special needs learners in P.L. 98-524. A list of these assurances follows:

> The State Board shall, with respect to... vocational education services and activities for handicapped and disadvantaged individuals, provide assurances that -
>
> 1. equal access will be provided to handicapped and disadvantaged individuals in recruitment, enrollment and placement activities;
>
> 2. equal access will be provided to handicapped and disadvantaged individuals to the full range of vocational programs available to nonhandicapped and nondisadvantaged individuals including occupationally specific courses of study, cooperative education, and apprenticeship programs;
>
> 3. (A) vocational education programs and activities for handicapped individuals will be provided in the least restrictive environment in accordance with section 612 (5) (B) of the Education of the Handicapped Act and will, whenever appropriate, be included as a component of the individualized education program (IEP) required in the Act; and
>
> (B) vocational education planning for handicapped individuals will be coordinated between appropriate representatives of vocational education and special education. (Section 204 A)

In addition, P.L. 98-524 stresses that:

> Each student who enrolls in vocational education programs **shall** receive:
>
> 1. assessment of the interests, abilities and special needs... with respect to completing successfully the vocational education program;
>
> 2. special services including adaptation of curriculum, instruction, equipment and facilities, designed to meet the needs from (1) above;
>
> 3. guidance, counseling and career development activities by professionally trained counselors who are associated with the provision of such special services; and
>
> 4. counseling services designed to facilitate the transition from school to post-school employment and career opportunities (Section 104 C).

These assurances should be converted into a comprehensive process at the local level. This process should contain the following components:

Component 1: Career development activities should be started as early as possible and be continuous throughout the educational program of the learner.

Component 2: Guidance and counseling services should be provided as soon as the career development activities begin and should be continuous throughout the educational program of the learner.

Component 3: Information relative to vocational education opportunities and eligibility requirements should be provided to handicapped and disadvantaged students and their parents no later than the end of the eighth grade. This information should be a part of the comprehensive career development process. Results of exploratory experiences and interest inventories can be shared along with specific program informaton, especially if a preliminary plan is going to be developed.

Component 4: A vocational assessement process should be established at the local school level to provide information relative to the learner's interests, abilities and special needs. This information should be viewed in relationship to the learner's ability to successfully complete a specific vocational program. Counseling services (Component 2) should be incorporated at this stage to interpret and share results with teachers, parents and students.

Component 5: Handicapped and disadvantaged students must be provided equal access in relationship to recruitment activities, enrollment in vocational education programs and placement activities. This assurance should occur when students are ready to make a

program selection. Counseling services (Component 2) should be used to help students make an appropriate program choice. Interest inventories, results from exploratory experiences and other relevant information can be introduced into the decision-making process. Parents should be a member of the team making the decision.

Component 6: Handicapped and disadvantaged students should be able to choose from the full range of vocational programs available to all others. No longer can special needs learners be "dumped" into one program and denied access to another program.

Component 7: Handicapped students must be placed in the least restrictive environment which meets their abilities, interests and needs. This infers choosing from the full range of available vocational programs (Component 6) and relying on vocational assessment information (Component 4) to determine appropriate modifications.

Component 8: Vocational education planning for handicapped students will be coordinated between vocational educators and special educators. In a comprehensive process for special needs learners this component can be expanded to mean that vocational education planning for disadvantaged student should be coordinated between vocational education, compensatory education and appropriate support personnel. Results of vocational assessment information (Component 4) should be utilized in this cooperative planning phase. This planning should begin to take place as program information is shared with students and parents (Component 3), as career development activities continue past the middle school grades (Component 1) and as the vocational assessment process takes place (Component 4).

Component 9: Vocational education should be included as a component of the individualized education program (IEP) required for handicapped students. This component should be coordinated cooperatively between vocationa educators and special educators (Component 8). If the state or local district emphasizes the development of an individualized vocational education plan (IVEP) for disadvantaged students, the information should be coordinated jointly among vocational education, compensatory education and appropriate support personnel. vocational assessment information (Component 4) should be utilized in developing the plan.

Component 10: Necessary special services should be identified that will assist the student to succeed in the vocational program. These servces may include curriculum modification, specific instructional strategies or equipment and facilities modification. Some useful information can be obtained from vocational assessement information (Component 4). Documentation of special services should be made in the student's IEP or IVEP (Component 9). Vocational information should be incorporated into a learner's individualized plan as early as possible in the form of career development objectives (Component 1), but certainly should be evident once information has been provided about vocational

opportunities (Component 3) and a career goal has been established.

Component 11: Counseling services should be provided to facilitate the transition from school to employment or other career opportunities. These services should be identified after the learner is placed in a vocational program. (Component 7) Identification of necessary transition services should be an ongoing activity and could be specified in a comprehensive transition plan developed for each learner to provide post-school direction.

Importance of Providing Vocational Education Information to Disadvantaged Students and Their Parents/Guardians

The selection of an appropriate vocational education program for a disadvantaged student must be based on a clear understanding of the programs that are available to the student as well as a realistic career goal based on the interests, aspirations and abilities of the student. It should be a collective decision involving the student, the parents/guardians, support personnel and vocational educators.

Regardless of the strategies that are employed by the local district to provide parents/guardians of disadvantaged students with information about vocational education opportunities, local districts may want to consider addressing the following elements:

1. an overview of why it is important to establish post school plans at an early age so that the secondary years can be planned accordingly;
2. an overview of the goals and purpose of vocational education;
3. a brief description of specific vocational programs available at the local level (secondary and post secondary);
4. eligibility criteria for specific programs;
5. admissions procedures for specific programs;
6. a description of the specific vocational assessment process that will be provided for disadvantaged learners in the district;

7. activities that parents/guardians can become involved in to facilitate the career development process;

8. basic skills, knowledge and employability skills that employers expect from entry level workers and how they are a part of vocational education curricula;

9. job opportunities available with completion of the total vocational program or a portion of it (multiple exit points);

10. an approximate amount of time the student will typically spend in vocational education coursework;

11. examples of methods available to vocational teachers to teach entry level or transferable skills to students (e.g., cooperative education, supervised occupational experiences, simulated work experiences, participation in vocational student organization activities);

12. special support services available to disadvantaged students enrolled in vocational programs;

13. a name, address and phone number of a local contact person.

The strategies selected to provide program information can become an effective recruitment method for vocational education teachers. The reality of declining enrollment in vocational education programs combined with an increase in graduation requirements in a number of states, which often precludes many students from enrolling in vocational education, should make disadvantaged students an attractive pool of eligible students to vocational educators.

The assurances in P.L. 98-524 of an appropriate vocational assessment, process counseling services and curriculum modification services for disadvantaged learners should help vocational teachers to feel more secure in their ability to work with them.

State's Response to Providing Information: A Sample

To provide an overview of the strategies being utilized during the first year of implementation of P.L. 98-524 a random sample of states was selected for a telephone survey. The State Coordinator for Vocational Special Needs Programs and/or a teacher educator in the area of Vocational Special Needs was interviewed from the following states:

Colorado
Georgia
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Kentucky
Maryland
Minnesota
North Carolina
Ohio
Texas
Wisconsin

Each of the individuals interviewed was asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What activities or strategies are being used in your state to assure that information relative to vocational education opportunities is provided to disadvantaged students and their parents/guardians at least by the beginning of the ninth grade?

2. Is information concerning available post secondary program opportunities presented to students and their parents/guardians as a transition option from a secondary Vocational progam?

3. What problems and concerns are local school districts voicing relative to providing this information to students and their parents/guardians?

In addition, Charlotte Conaway, Program Specialist in the Office of Education in Washington, D.C. was contacted to provide direction for this paper.

The results of questions #1 and #2 (above) were tabulated and recorded in Table 1: An Overview of Suggested Strategies for Providing Information Relative to Vocational Education Opportunities to Disadvantaged Students and their Parents/Guardians.

Table 1

An Overview of Suggested Strategies for Providing Information Relative to Vocational Education Opportunities to Disadvantaged Students and Parents/Guardians

Activity	Description	People Involved
Brochures, Flyers and Leaflets	Brochures, flyers and leaflets describe the vocational programs available in the local district. Information should include: a. Basic program information b. Eligibility requirements c. Admission policy d. Job opportunities e. Contact information (name, address, phone) f. School pilicy statement on nondiscrimination	Administrators Vocational Teachers Counselors Special Needs Coordinators
Career Day	This activity can be set up in a gymnasium, auditorium or in each individual vocational classroom/ laboratory. Employers and advisory committee members can be available to talk about employment opportunities in the community. Vocational teachers talk to students and parents about program activities, multiple exit points and entry level competencies that students can be prepared for in the vocational program. If the Career Day activity is based in the vocational classroom/ laboratory, teachers and students can demonstrate equipment, tools and procedures that represent the program. Programs available for further development of skills at the post secondary level should be introduced.	Administrators Vocational Teachers Empolyers Counselors Special Needs Coordinators Students Parents
Newsletter	A school newsletter can be produced periodically throughout the year to provide updated information on the activities being conducted in each vocational program (e.g., program highlights, vocational student organization activities/events, contact for specific program information)	Vocational Teachers Public Relations Personnel
Parent Letter	A letter can be sent to the parent/ guardian of every identified disadvantaged student. The letter should	Administrators Vocational Personnel

	contain, at a minimum: a. Description of vocational education, available local programs, and possible job opportunities b. Admissions requirements c. Name, address and phone number of contact person d. Nondiscrimination statement If there are limited English-proficient populations in the community the letter should be written in the native language spoken in the home. Many districts are sending parent letters to <u>every</u> eighth grade student. Some districts are asking the parent/guardian to sign the letter and return it to the school.	Vocational Special Needs Coordinators
Video Presentaton	Video "spots" about vocational education opportunities can be developed for use on local television stations. These short segments can present information on the goals of vocational education, local secondary programs, employment opportunities available in the community, post secondary opportunities, a local contact person and phone number. These spots can be produced in the native language spoken in the community to meet the needs of limited English proficient populations. They can also be used for local community groups, PTA meetings, etc.	Administrators Vocational Personnel Vocational Special Needs Coordinators
TV and Radio Spots	Spot announcements and news items can be developed for use on local radio and television stations. Information could focus on the goals of vocational programs, admission requirements, local programs available (secondary and post secondary) employment opportunities, local contact name, address and phone number. These segments can be done in the native languages spoken in the homes in the community. In addition to short "spots", panel discussions, debates, demonstrations, guest appearances and interviews can be prepared. A nondiscrimination statement should be included in every presentation.	Administrators Vocational Personnel Media Personnel Vocational Special Needs Coordinators Employers
Exploratory Experiences	Students of the middle school level can become involved in exploratory experiences in existing vocational programs. After participating in a number of programs, student responses and preferences can be	Administrators Vocational Personnel Prevocational teachers Special Needs coordinators Counselors

	recorded. A copy of this information, along with programs in which students register a strong interest, can be sent home to the parent/guardian with program descriptions and admissions criteria. Another copy should be put in the student file in the guidance office for use in student/parent conference to plan the student's high school program.	
Student Assembly	An assembly can be arranged to include all eighth grade students. Information about local vocational programs can be presented. Vocational teachers and employers can be instrumental in providing specific information on program opportunities, sequence of courses for graduation, skills to be developed in the program, vocational student organization activities, and employment opportunities. Brochures, leaflets, student handbooks, memos or letters can be sent home to parents/guardians after the assembly. Parents can also be invited to be a participant at the assembly.	Administrators Vocational Personnel Employers Special Needs Coordinators Counselors
Counselor Meeting	Many eighth grade students have individual conferences with the counselor and the parent/guardian. During these sessions the direction the student will take in high school and beyond is usually discussed and mapped out. Results of exploratory experiences in vocational programs, interest inventories and other related information should be presented during the conference. Parents could be invitied to visit prospective programs and teachers at this time. Brochures, slide presentations and, video "spots" can be used to provide further information after the conference. Counselors can also introduce parents to support personnel who can describe services that are available to the student.	Counselors Students Parents/Guardians Support Personnel
Open House	This can be either school-wide or limited to the vocational programs available in the district. Notification should be made to all parents, in the native language spoken in the home, inviting them to attend the open house. At this time, program information can be shared and actual demonstrations can be conducted to show related skills taught in the program. Employers and advisory committee members	Administrators Vocational Personnel Parents/Guardians Special Needs Coordinators Support Personnel

	can also be a part of this event. Support personnel can be present to describe the services available to help students succeed in the program.	
Newspaper Releases	News releases and articles can be used to describe vocational program opportunities to parents in the community. Specific information can be provided about program descriptions, eligibility requirements admission criteria and procedures and the name and number of a local contact. In addition, information can be included about the the progress of vocational student organization on school and communication projects, news from program graduates, recognition of specific student achievements, results of fund raising drives, and new courses or programs authorizes.	Administrators Vocational Personnel Special Needs Coordinators Vocational Student Organization Members Public Relations
Presentations by Vocational Teachers	Vocational teachers can visit middle school classes individually or in small teams. They can provide students with information about program opportunities, vocational student organization opportunities, potential employment possiblities courses to take at the secondary level and post secondary options. Brochures, leaflets, pamphlets or other information can be passed out for students to take home. Vocational student organization members can accompany the vocational teachers to provide another perspective.	Vocational Personnel Counselors Special Needs Coordinators Middle School Personnel Vocational Student Organization Members
Displays at Places of Public Gatherings	Displays at malls, community centers, fairs, cultural events, church events, etc. can provide information to community members about vocational education opportunities on the secondary and post secondary level. This information should be printed in the language spoken in the homes of the community members.	Vocational Personnel Special Needs Coordinators Public Relations Staff
"Sidewalk Cafes"	This activity is usually conducted after school hours (evenings, weekends) and involves small gatherings that meet informally "over coffee" to discuss information about vocational education opportunities. This could occur at a student's home with several neighbors, at a Neighborhood Center, or after a community meeting. Vocational teachers, counselors, special needs coordinators and vocational student organization members	Vocational Personnel Special Needs Coordinators Vocational Student Organization Members Parents/Guardians

	can all volunteer to take part in this activity. Brochures could be disseminated with a contact name and number for further information.	
Presentations to Community Groups	Vocational teachers, special needs coordinators, counselors, administrators or vocational student organization members can share information about vocational program opportunities to local community groups. Slide tape and video presentations can be incorporated into these activities. General questions can be addressed. Brochures, pamphlets and leaflets can be disseminated. An interpreter should be available to work with limited English-proficient participants.	Administrators Vocational Personnel Counselors Special Needs Coordinators Vocational Student Orgianization Members Interpreter
Student Handbook	A student handbook is usually made available to every eighth grader to provide information about options available at the secondary level. One section of the handbook should describe vocational education as an option for students at the secondary level. At a minimum, this section should include a description of what vocational education is as well as a brief narrative for each program available at the local level, courses to be taken in high school, admissions procedures, eligibility criteria, and possible employment opportunities.	Administrators Vocational Personnel Counselor Special Needs Coordinators
Telephone Calls to Parents	Special needs coordinators or counselors can make personal phone calls to the parent/guardian of identified disadvantaged students in the eighth grade to discuss the option of vocational education. Specific information should be provide at this time. An invitation can be made for parents to visit the school, teachers, and vocational programs. Interpreters should be available to furnish information for limited English-proficient parents.	Special Needs Coordinators Counselors Parents/Guardians Interpreters

Home Visits	Special needs coordinators can make home visits to share information about vocational program opportunities with parents or guardians of identified disadvantaged students. Interpreters may be needed to communicate information to limited English-proficient families. Specific program descriptions, eligibility requirements, admission criteria and procedures, multiple exit points, employment opportunities and post secondary programs should be provided.	Special Needs Coordinators Parents/Guardians Students Interpreters
Handbook of Guidelines Disseminated by State Department	A handbook could be developed by the State Department of Education to provide direction to local school districts concerning the assurances for special populations in P.L. 98-524. Suggested information and strategies could include: a. Timeline for providing vocational education information to students and their parents. b. Methods for providing information on vocational opportunities. c. Specific points to be included in vocational information (e.g., program descriptions, admission procedures, eligibility requirements, job opportunities, post secondary opportunities person(s) to be contacted). d. Information about basic skills and knowledge necessary for success in each vocational program. e. Types of additional services and support that will be available from the local school district. f. Documentation (e.g., necessary information to be kept on file, sample forms).	State Department Personnel Local Education Agency Administrators Local School Personnel Involved in Developing and Implementing Plans

Each district should identify an administrative contact in order to foster continuity and networking in the state.

Career Plans Developed Through Prevocational Class Experiences	Students who participate in prevocational classes at the middle school level can be provided with information about secondary and post secondary options available at the local level. Student choices can be recorded in a career plan which outlines all courses to be taken from ninth to twelfth grade and beyond, if appropriate. These plans are then taken home to be shared with the parent. A follow-up meeting with a counselor may be needed.	Prevocational Instructors Special Needs Coordinators Special Needs Students Counselors

Suggested Activities Shared Through Local Administrator	Local administrators can network and share innovative and successful ideas about providing information to parents through a statewide bulletin or memo format. In this manner, model programs can gain recognition and districts which are searching for successful strategies can be informed about possible options without having to "reinvent the wheel".	Administrators Vocational Personnel Special Needs Coordinators Coordinators
Vocational Student Organization Members	Vocational student organization members can provide valuable insight into vocational program goals and activities as well as information about entry level skills, classes to take in high school and employment opportunities. These volunteers can be helpful in a number of activities, including talking to parent groups, student groups, community organizations, serving as peer guides to eighth grade exploration students, helping at booths at the mall, passing out brochures at PTA meetings, etc.	Vocational Personnel Vocational Student Organization Members Students Eighth Grade Personnel Parents/Guardians
Tour of Vocational Facilities for Advocacy Groups	Community groups which have an interest in helping disadvantaged populations can be invited to tour vocational programs. Individuals would then be able to talk individually with vocational teachers and students and learn what the programs entail. They can then pass this information on to parents and interested students	Administrators Vocational Personnel Special Needs Coordinators
Job Service Centers and Employment Centers	Bulletin board, displays and other vehicles for sharing information can be placed in Job Service Centers and Employment Centers. The counselors at these centers should have specific referral information available.	Vocational Personnel Special Needs Coordinators
Individualized Transition Plan	Some states are now mandating that special needs students have a transition plan developed as they enter the ninth grade. The plan should contain the courses the student will take during the four years in high school as well as projected plans past high school. Support services that the student will need are listed in the plan. These plans should be developed while the student is in the eighth grade. Information provided to students and their parents/guardians about vocational education opportunities could have an important impact on this	Special Needs Coordinators Student Counselors Parent/Guardian

transition plan. Post secondary opportunities should be included in the plan as a post high school option.

The concerns and issues of local school districts reported during the telephone surveys are as follows:

1. Inservice sessions must be provided to personnel now being placed in the position of providing information about vocational program opportunities. Among those most closely affected are guidance counselors, administrators, compensatory education personnel and support personnel. The individuals will not be able to adequately explain program opportunities until they better understand vocational education philosophy and delivery systems. Internships and minigrants could be sought from special needs funds to provide for this training.

2. Local districts need to be aware that the parents of many disadvantaged students will not be reached by such widely used strategies as sending a student handbook or brochure home. student. Some parents may not have the basic skills to read and comprehend the information; others may not speak English in the home and will therefore not understand the information; still others may be confused by the option of vocatinal education when the only option they have in their mind is a "high school diploma".

3. Local district personnel may have to seek out the parents of disadvantaged students using nontraditional methods such as home visits, presentations at community centers, advertising in "underground newspapers", setting up "sidewalk cafe" situations and informal samll group activities. "High risk" populations are not likely to have parents that frequently attend PTA meetings, open houses or individual conferences with a counselor.

4. Lack of administrative support and understanding at the local level can prevent the innovative outreach activities that may be necessary to meet the full intention of the P.L. 98-524 assurance that information be provided to students and their parents relative to vocational education opportunities. Direction and guidelines should be formulated at the state level and disseminated to local administrators.

5. Limited English-proficient populations must be kept in mind when identifying activities that will be used to provide vocational education information. Volunteer interpreters should be identified to help convert information into the native languages spoken in the community. Leaders in local ethnic communities should be polled to identify strategies that would be effective in disseminating program information to individuals in these groups.

6. Unless a formal four year transition plan is developed by the student and parent to provide direction for the student's secondary program, the information about vocational education opportunities provided at the eighth grade will not retain the intended impact until eleventh grade when the student can enroll in a vocational program. Some local districts seem reluctant to "commit" students to vocational education in the eighth grade.

Challenges for Individuals Working with Disadvantaged Populations

In the future there will be many challenges facing individuals who work with disadvantaged populations. Several of these challenges will be crucial to the success of the assurance in P.L. 98-524 that information concerning vocational education opportunities be made available to disadvantaged students and their parents. A few of the pressing issues that will have to be addressed are listed below:

1. The image of vocational education as a viable option for individuals entering the secondary school program must be projected. In the past, vocational education has been seen as a program for "someone else's son or daughter".

2. Inservice sessions must be coordinated and delivered to personnel who join vocational teachers in providing information to students and parents about the opportunities available through vocational programs. Administrators, counselors and support personnel will have to be more knowledgeable about the goals of vocational programs, specific program offerings at the secondary and post secondary levels, multiple exit points and employment opportunities.

3. Data should be collected relative to the effectiveness of the strategies used to provide information to students and their parents. If methods are chosen haphazardly, with no follow-up, there is no guarantee that the method will succeed. For example, when they enroll in a vocational program (secondary or post secondary) students identified as disadvantaged learners can be asked where they learned about the vocational program and what helped them to make a decision. The data should be continuously analyzed to determine whether current strategies should be continued or new methods should be substituted or added.

4. Educational personnel must become more familiar with outside agencies and community based organizations that serve disadvantaged populations. Networking must be established so that people are aware of available training programs and associated services. This will make the referral process for disadvantaged individuals move more smoothly and may prevent duplication of services.

5. Existing interagency cooperative agreements at the state and local level should be expanded and reorganized to include designated roles and responsibilities for other agencies involved in collaborative planning for vocational opportunities for disadvantaged populations. For example, several states are now including the Division of Guidance Services in the State Interagency Agreement.

6. Regular education personnel at the primary and middle school levels need to learn and utilize strategies to infuse career development information into existing curricula so that a basic foundation in career awareness and career orientation is built prior to information being provided to students and their parents about vocational program opportunities. This will require widespread inservice prompted by local administrative support.

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